

Fairground Farms & Farmyard Festivals; Showcasing California Specialty Crops
Yolo County Fair – August 16, 2012

Group Discussion notes compiled by Penny Leff, UC ANR Small Farm Program

Challenges facing fairs, specialty crop growers, agritourism operators and collaborative efforts

- Making sure that there is a positive value to growers for participating in the fair. Often growers do not see a value in fair participation
- Any event that a farmer participates in must be worth the time and effort and investment that it takes to be part of it
- Customers have a hard time seeing the value of local food when it is more expensive at the farmers' market than at the supermarket
- Marketing in general is a challenge
- Getting the public out of doors is a challenge
- The fair conflicts with harvest time – a busy time for farmers
- The general public has a lack of understanding about agriculture
- For agritourism operations, getting people to come to a remote location is hard
- For agritourism operations, liability and insurance are challenges
- Compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act is hard for new agritourism operations.
- Environmental health regulations and permitting issues are a challenge for farmers and agritourism operators wanting to hold events, invite visitors, and serve food to visitors on their farms and ranches. In Yolo County, many agritourism operations operate “underground” because it is too difficult and expensive to meet regulations. This causes legal risk for these operators, lack of clear information and marketing options, and inequality among those who follow the rules and those who don't.

Opportunities for fairs, specialty crop growers, agritourism operators and collaborative efforts

- Fair vendors buying more from local farmers
- The creation of a food hub on the fairgrounds or nearby, for aggregation of local farm products and easier access to local produce
- Join or form an association to lobby for changes in state and county regulations that limit agritourism opportunities
- Farmers and local food producers rent the kitchens at the fairgrounds for creating value-added products
- Create a “kitchen incubator” project at the fairgrounds to help develop new food processing businesses
- Connect with Master Food Preservers and Master Gardeners to offer cooking and canning classes in the high school kitchen
- Hold an agritourism expo
- Agritourism planning classes coming up in Sacramento County this winter, organized by the UC ANR Small Farm Program

- Fairs could invite farmers to participate in designing educational activities at the fair, not just exhibiting their products
- Tourism workshops and education could be offered for farmers and agritourism operators
- Yolo County Farm Bureau works with Sysco/Fresh Point to offer training in Good Agricultural Practices and Food Safety Certification – required for farmers who want to sell wholesale, to institutions
- Western Fairs Association works with CDFA on creating a list of food producers, farmers for fair vendors
- Check out <http://atasteofyolo.net/> for “Harvest Hub Yolo”!

Next steps for fairs, specialty crop growers, agritourism operators and collaborative efforts

- Research ADA and other requirements for opening an agritourism operation
- Work to change the rules on using home/farm kitchens for food production
- Lobby for the California Cottage Food Bill
- Retire
- Finalize and hire someone for the new Yolo/Solano Counties shared Ombudsman position
- Organize and participate in temporary events to avoid some ADA and other regulations
- Participate in fairs and other non-profit and temporary events that are not regulated as strictly as private agritourism operations and activities
- Join the Western Fairs Association
- Coordinate with fellow event organizers to share lists of vendors and participants

Other suggestions from evaluation forms:

- I’d like to see more of these workshops with a specific focus, like agricultural education or festivals, maybe inviting speakers from festivals around California to talk about their experiences. This would be useful for non-farming folks.
- Voice your outcomes from this brainstorming session to advocacy groups or legislative representatives